“Restart” Helping Middle Schoolers Appreciate The Joy of New Beginnings
You could say that every one of the 474 sixth, seventh and eighth graders at Newark Middle School have all recently been on the same page.

That’s because they’re all reading “Restart,” by children and young adults fiction writer Gordon Korman about a 13-year-old Middle School bully and football team star named Chase Ambrose who gets amnesia after a fall from the roof of his house.

When he’s able to return to Hiawasse Middle School, he is puzzled by his peers’ strange reactions to him, like conversations abruptly ending when he approaches and some quickly turning and walking the other way as if afraid.

With no clue as to why and no memory to draw from plus the fact his family didn’t reveal how rotten his behavior was before the accident, the “new” Chase, who is kind, friendly and helpful, realizes he must not have been a nice person to be around before losing his memory.

His suspicions are confirmed when Hiawasse Principal Dr. Fitzwallace, urges Chase to see his return as “a chance to rebuilt yourself from the ground up, to make a completely fresh start.”

While he’s torn between the persuasive prodding from his prior bullying buddies Aaron Haikiman and Bear Bratsky who do their darndest to draw him back into the threesome’s despicable behavior of terrorizing just about everyone they came into contact with in school and their town the charitable influence of caring individuals like honor-roll student and Video Club president Brendan Espinoza who invites Chase to help him make a video and join the club Chase realizes his accident has afforded him a second chance _ a restart of you will _ to be someone he and others enjoy knowing and being around.

“We chose to embark on a “One Book, One School” experience to build community not only for our students, but our families,” NMS Principal Teresa Prinzi, said. “Our entire staff had the opportunity to read the book over the summer or to read along with our students. Having everyone reading and talking about the same book and characters opens up great conversation. And with the main character being a middle school student who has the opportunity to reinvent or rather RESTART himself we thought it was a great choice for our first “One Book, One School” event. The characters and the events are relatable to our students. It has been great to see students not only carrying their books, but also reading and talking about it! Since beginning this journey, I have had a number of students ask what will be our next book or ask if they can pick the next book. Now that’s a great endorsement!”
Sixth grade ELA and Social Studies teachers Lindsay Dibble and Jen Pearson are overseeing the two-month long “One Book, One School” initiative replete with school-wide activities and a “Restart” Reading Club to reinforce its powerful message that will have every student finishing reading their very own copy of “Restart” at home and in school by the end of November.

Even the Newark Library is on board and has extra copies of the book available for parent and others to read.

“It’s a relatable, good book an amazing read that speaks to children who want a second chance. It actually tells everyone it’s never too late for a second chance,” Pearson said.

And like Prinzi, not only do she and Dibble say they are hearing nothing but positives from students and staff about the book, but are also being quizzed about the next one the entire school can read.

To heighten interest, Prinzi reads trivia questions each Friday on the public address system that students answer on paper with their name and grade level and every week one winner from each grade is announced and given prizes.

“Reading this book has gotten students excited about reading,” Dibble said. “It has opened up a lot of dialog and helped improve communication between students, and students and staff. We are seeing more students standing up for others. It’s a kinder culture here now.”

Sixth Grader Matteo Botelho, who is a member of the “Restart” Reading Club says he and other sixth graders can easily relate to “Restart” because they all experienced a “restart” by recently moving up from Kelley School as fifth graders to the sixth grade at Middle School.

“It’s cool how Chase gets another chance at life,” he said.

Another “Restart” Reading Club member Ethan Klock said: “It’s a good book because it makes you think about what you would do if you got amnesia. What would happen with your relationships, your thoughts about school and your friends?”

“The message in “Restart” is don’t judge a book by it’s cover. Chase was a bad guy at first but some people probably knew he could be good deep down,” said Gabby Baker, another sixth grader.

Thanks to Lindsay Dibble for providing two photos!